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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7828 12 October 2013

Which one?



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Seeking the historical Buddha

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER
Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

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Editor M Colleen Burns MA

46A Newmarket Road

Cringleford

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: inquirer@btinternet.com

Copyeditor Sarah Reynolds

Cover photo Greater Buddha in Japan by Hemant

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Write to James Barry

24 Lodge Lane

Keymer, Hassocks

West Sussex, BN6 8NA

ph: 01273 844940

e: inquirersubs@gmail.com

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The General Assembly, Essex Hall

1-6 Essex Street

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ph: 0207 2402384

Inquiring Words

Recipe for Forgiveness

By the young people who attended Five Days Away in August

Ingredients: love, acceptance, patience, anger, thoughtfulness

Equipment: heart, friends, family, brain, bowl, spoon, pan

Method:

1. Think about the problem
2. Accept that someone is hurting you
3. Try to understand why this person is hurting you and why they did it
4. Have some alone time
5. Think about the good qualities of this person
6. Ask a friend for their opinion on the situation
7. Beat the anger with a whisk
8. Take out the circumstances and sprinkle your understanding over them
9. Blend this with thoughtfulness, then mix in a bowl with a spoon
10. Wrap up in cling film and let it cool in the fridge using patience
11. After 30 minutes cut into cookie shapes and pour anger on it
12. Put in the oven for 15 minutes – this will let the anger burn
13. Take out of the oven and serve with love.



Follow **@The__Inquirer** (two underscores) on Twitter. A little shot of Unitarian news and faith in 140 characters. <https://twitter.com/>

What Do We Do At Our Annual Meetings?

Last year at Nottingham University, next year at Whittlebury Hall from 13th to 16th April, so come for a day, or two, or four - and get involved in the future of our movement!

Here are some images from our 2013 GA Annual Meetings to whet your appetite!



www.unitarian.org.uk/ga

Tel: 0207 240 2384

Debates, discussions and voting on the motions

Inspirational Guest Speakers

Entertainment, good food and accommodation, and the chance to meet up with old friends and make new ones

Special Interest Groups' workshops

Fun activities for young people

Bookshop and stalls

Joining in worship and singing (300+ voices!)

Enjoying good company, exchanging ideas and much, much more—see over the page for info about 2014!

A Change of Venue, and a Change of Style for our Annual Meetings next year, 13th to 16th April 2014



The venue will be Whittlebury Hall, near Towcester in Northamptonshire, which is a 4-star Hotel, Management Training Centre and Spa with fabulous facilities and plenty of on-site parking right next to the hotel. This means that the venue style will be very different from our usual event in a University campus.

For a start, at Whittlebury Hall

all our meals, main sessions, interest groups and social events will be in the main hotel—so no need to brave the weather dashing between different buildings! Most bedrooms are also in the same building. Also, despite the fact that the cost is similar to what we normally pay, as it is a 4-star hotel, all the bedrooms are furnished and decorated to a high standard, and every room is en-suite. All the bedrooms are capable of being twins or doubles, and we are therefore encouraging people to share with family or friends - potentially an attractive option, because there will be a **discount of £15 per night per person for those sharing**, which could be a saving of up to £90 per couple, or pair of friends, for the 3 nights—well worth thinking about!



Then there are the fantastic facilities such as a Leisure Club which is free for us to use, which has a 19 metre swimming pool with whirlpool spa, plus a sauna, steam room and well-equipped gym. Add to that the spa and golf facilities – for an extra payment you can book treatments like facials or massages, or visit the hydrotherapy pool, or instead tee off on one of the four on-site 9-hole golf courses – and clearly the 2014 GA Annual Meetings are going to feel pretty special!

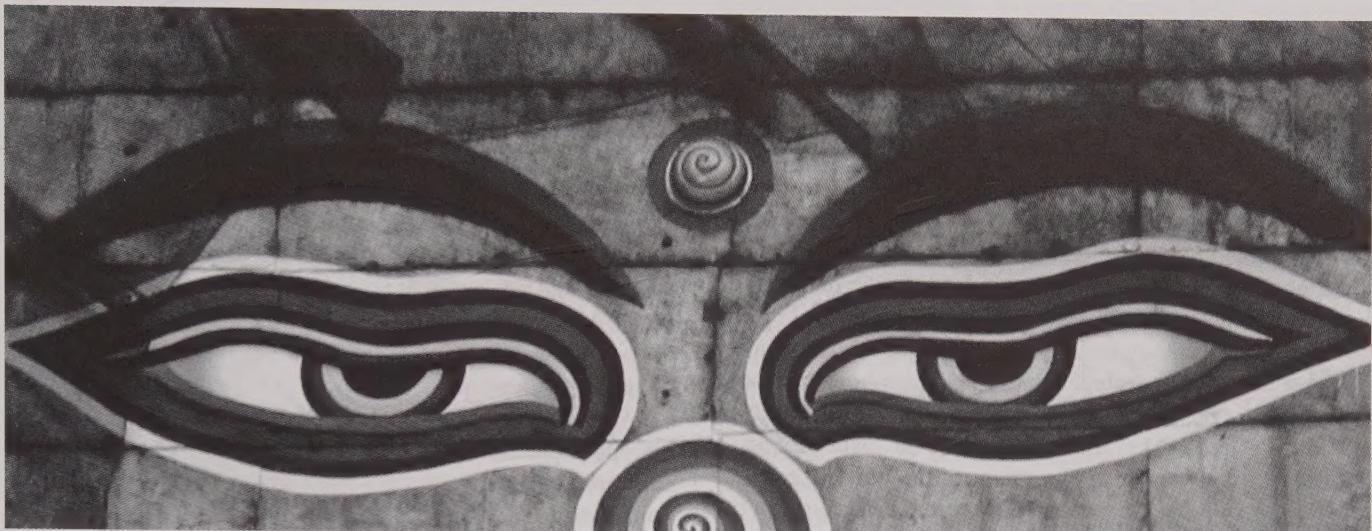


There will be changes to our usual programme, too, with the Anniversary Service being on the opening Sunday night, a top class comedian, Robin Ince, to entertain us on the final evening, and excellent guest speakers such as Alan Ruston and Rabbi Danny Rich of Liberal Judaism.

So come along, enjoy some really different experiences at the 2014 Annual Meetings, as well as all the familiar fun of being with lots of Unitarians, taking part in discussions, sharing viewpoints and laughter, tucking into good food, and generally having a good time!

Their website is www.whittleburyhall.co.uk if you'd like more information about the venue.

The quest for the historical Buddha



The eyes of Buddha at a temple in Kathmandu, Nepal. Photo by Sharell Cook

A scholar finds the historical Buddha may be far from the conventional serene and smiling cross-legged feudal aristocrat finding his way out of the cycle of re-incarnation into a denial of life. **Iain Brown** compares it with Unitarians' rejection of Jesus as a god figure.

When Albert Schweitzer published his *Quest of the Historical Jesus* in German in 1906 there already were more than 200 years of post-Enlightenment scholarship on the subject to review. By the year 2000 there were more than 100 contemporary scholars meeting in the Jesus Seminars, voting on what was authentic in the scriptural accounts of Jesus. In contrast, the published quest for the historical Buddha seems to have begun in the 21st century with the one-man scholarship of Stephen Batchelor in his books *Buddhism Without Beliefs* and especially in *Confession of a Buddhist Atheist* (2011).

Constructing a portrait of Buddha

The Pali Canon contains the earliest texts of the teachings of Siddhattha Gotama, the Buddha, and it has been well studied by Western Scholars. Much of its authenticity and integrity is now well affirmed but no one seems to have approached it previously with the aim of constructing a portrait of Gotama, the man himself. Stephen Batchelor is a well-respected translator of Buddhist texts and a former monk in both the Tibetan and South Asian traditions. He has combed the Pali Canon with the aim of isolating, assembling all references to the life of Gotama and interpreting them into a biography.

What he finds is wholly unlike the God-like figure usually projected by traditional Buddhism. The problem is, as Batchelor states it, that "For traditional Buddhists, the Buddha has come to be seen as the perfect person, to have eliminated from his mind every last trace of greed, hatred and confusion. At the same time the Buddha is believed to have acquired faultless wisdom and boundless compassion. He is omniscient and

unerringly loving. He has become God."

Batchelor's rejection of Siddhattha Gotama as God is parallel in some ways with the Unitarian rejection of Jesus the man as God. The picture of Buddha that Batchelor comes up with is far from the conventional serene and smiling cross-legged feudal aristocrat protected by his monastery and finding his way out of the cycle of re-incarnation into a denial of life. Batchelor shows how Siddhattha Gotama, the man, could not possibly have operated as he did with a band of followers such as he had at the Deer Park and the Jade Garden in North India at the time he lived, without political patronage and without the worldly relationships and intrigue that was involved in maintaining that. This immediately suggests a much more worldly-wise individual than the remote ascetic.

Accepted biography could be a myth

The traditional story of the son of the king who is shielded from all suffering until he breaks out of his secluded protection and is then shocked by illness, old age and death was not about the man who became an ascetic monk, who meditated, believed he had found the middle way and became the Buddha. That story was not about the Buddha at all but is a mythical tale related by Gotama himself about a much earlier figure, a man called Vipassi. Gotama was not the son of a king but rather of a minor nobleman, a regional governor of Sakiya a part of the kingdom of Kosala, ruled by King Pasendra with whom Siddhattha Gotama had to cope every inch of the way. It is a story of intrigue, betrayal and murder surrounding Gotama's relationship with his royal patron, King Pasendra, the relationship which gave him security and access to wealth. At one point Gotama had to flee from Pasendra because his family had deceived Pasendra's family over a marriage.

Gotama did not try for new faith

As Batchelor writes, "Gotama, like the rest of us, inhabited an uncertain and unpredictable world." His was a rebel community against several of the prevailing orthodoxies of the surrounding Hinduism and there were endemic hostilities rooted in that. He had to compete with several other local gurus for patronage from the king and other rich men. Stephen Batch-

(Continued on next page)

No magic in meditation and mindfulness

(Continued from previous page)

Batchelor finds no evidence from the Pali scriptures that Gotama ever intended to found a new religion but within his own following there were powerful people who wished to take the leadership away from him.

In just such an uncertain world it seems no surprise that the core of Gotama's teachings are mostly about how to keep your emotional balance. He taught the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold path focused on mindfulness as the only way to live effectively and happily in a real world unprotected by any monastery – accept uncertainty and unpredictability (what he called contingency), embrace suffering, learn how to control your desires and how to move your thinking from negative towards positive. No surprise then, that, to the dismay of some traditional Buddhists, several sections of the Western psychotherapeutic industry have cherry-picked the techniques in the corpus of mindfulness and meditation that enhance mental health and have left behind all the metaphysical speculation. We even have Catholic nuns meditating now without any apparent warnings from the papal orthodoxy and large American corporations are offering it to their workforces to assuage stress.

Gotama is not a mystic

In keeping with just such a picture of the man Gotama, Batchelor finds no evidence of metaphysical speculation. More, the famous story of the man who has been wounded with a poisoned arrow but refuses to have it removed until he knows "the name and clan of the person who fired it; whether the bow was a long or a cross bow; whether the arrow was hoof-tipped, curved or barbed." suggests a certain contempt for it as Buddha compares a person who is preoccupied with speculations about existence after death, the difference between mind and body and the eternity and infinity of the universe to a common-sense pragmatic activist.

Nor does Gotama emerge from the Pali scriptures as a mystic. There is no magic about meditation and mindfulness. Thus, for him, consciousness is just what happens when an organism encounters an environment. "Just as fire," Gotama explained, is reckoned by the particular condition dependent on which it burns – a log fire, a grass fire, a dung fire and so on – so too consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition on which it arises." And Batchelor concludes that consciousness has no magical capacity to break free from the field of events out of which it springs. There is, therefore, no magic about meditation and no attempt to distinguish it from trance states.

There is no evidence from the Pali scriptures that Gotama ever intended to found a new religion but within his own following there were powerful people who wished to take the leadership away from him.

Cherry-picking faith

In the Kalama Sutra the Buddha of the ancient Pali texts expresses a remarkably modern, even an existentialist view. "It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain. Do not go upon what has been heard by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon sacred teaching; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias toward a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration 'this monk is our teacher'." And again "Suppose there is no hereafter and there is no fruit of deeds done well or ill. Yet in this world, here and now, free from hatred, free from malice, safe and sound, and happy, I keep myself."

No doubt Batchelor could be accused of the apparently egregious sin of cherry picking. But we all cherry pick our way through our education, through the Bible, through life.

Of course Batchelor's views brought cries of pain from traditional Buddhists of many kinds in the East and the West. Reviews were often bristling with hostility and moral superiority. But Batchelor has an extensive academic and practicing knowledge of both main traditions of Buddhism and he works as a scholar. All of the passages he draws on from the Pali scriptures are carefully referenced and his methods are clearly set out in an extensive appendix to his latest book.

Knowledge of Buddhism attacked

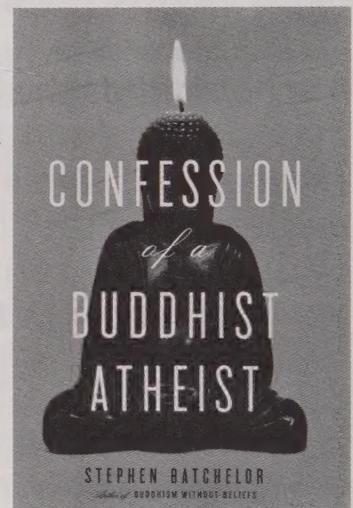
Cries of pain, accusations of ignorance of Buddhism and suggestions of moral inferiority may count with those who are already deeply invested into a personal belief system and a way of life, but, for the rest of the world, the only answer to Batchelor's scholarship and insightful analysis is more and different scholarship, perhaps challenging his selection of references from the Pali Canon and his interpretation of them.

As Batchelor finally writes, "I cannot claim that my version of the Buddha is somehow more true or correct than yours. All I can say is that the materials buried in the Pali Canon and elsewhere have not yet exhausted their capacity to generate more stories about Gotama and what he taught."

Iain Brown is a member of Glasgow Unitarians.
'Confession of a Buddhist Atheist' ISBN - 0385527071



Iain Brown



STEPHEN BATCHELOR
Author of BUDDHISM WITHOUT BELIEF

Law could limit Unitarian expression

By Derek McAuley

There has been a lot of comment in recent weeks about the effects on charities and churches of the 'Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill' currently progressing through Parliament. One view is that it will have "a chilling effect on freedom of expression". This is something about which Unitarians and Free Christians should be concerned, and should be prepared to express their views to Members of Parliament and/or Members of the House of Lords. (See the text of the bill here: <http://bit.ly/1bd3V1u>)

It is clear that in its current format the Lobbying Bill sets political limits on charity campaigning, which has emerged as a concern for many MPs. No doubt, the approaching General Election has rocketed this issue up the agenda.

Through its debates and resolutions, the Unitarian General Assembly (GA) has always been prepared to take a stand on political issues. Quite naturally, the Assembly has never supported one political party; not only would this contravene our status as a charity but such a partisan stance would offend our sense of what a religious community is and its purpose. Unitarians are, of course, members of various political parties and collectively the General Assembly must approach issues of public policy in terms of our values.

The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), of which the General Assembly is in membership, has been actively representing charities of all sizes and types, and is working hard to resist "any attempts to silence the voice of civil society."

I have been working with other churches, linked in the RADAR group (which brings together staff of various churches each month to look at what is happening in Parliament) and our joint views have been made known to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister.

There are concerns that the Bill – as currently drafted (on 1 October) – may potentially impact the ability of faith-based organisations – including campaigning groups, charities and

churches, among others – to express deeply-held beliefs in the political arena. The beliefs and practices of many involved in faith-based organisations often call for engagement in public debate. The work the churches carry out to raise awareness of issues important to their communities arises directly from their beliefs.

Unitarians, for example, were at the forefront of the debate on same-sex marriage, particularly in religious premises. It would have been perverse if our status as a charity would have prevented comment. Our stance on assisted dying is controversial and when this matter comes to Parliament next year we need to be free to comment.

Under the proposed new rules, the GA and local congregations could possibly run the risk of being accused of benefiting a political party or candidate. It has been suggested that the current wording of the Bill could possibly widen the scope of political activities such that legitimate campaigning and policy work may be threatened, despite such activities being intended to be party politically neutral.

I am sure we would all support clarity and transparency in lobbying and that measures should be in place to ensure that Parliament is not subject to undue influence from those with sectional interests and financial and other power.

The Government has decided to amend the bill to reduce its impact on campaigning but whether the changes go far enough to enable churches and charities to continue with their legitimate political work remains uncertain.

In an opinion written for the NCVO, Helen Mountfield QC writes, 'In my view, therefore, there is a serious case for saying that the proposals in Part II of the Bill as it presently stands (30 August) violate the right to freedom of political expression.' See her full opinion here: <http://bit.ly/GzzB6Z>

To identify your MP and send a message, see: www.theyworkforyou.com

Derek McAuley is chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.

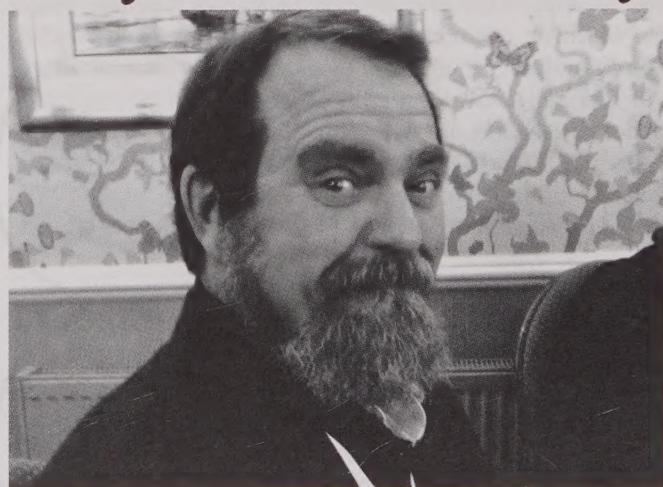
Channing lecture looks beyond Christianity

"More Than Merely Christian: Emerson's Wider Vision for Unitarianism" is the title of the 2013 Channing Lecture to be given by the Rev Dr Patrick T O'Neill. The lecture is scheduled for 3pm on Saturday 23 November at Golders Green Unitarians, Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS. Tickets are £5.

While William Ellery Channing was the acknowledged founder and leading voice of early Unitarianism in America, it was the second generation of American Unitarians – inspired by the clarion call of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Divinity School Address" in 1838 – that took Unitarianism beyond the confines of traditional Judeo-Christian theology to a wider vision. That wider vision drew inspiration and spiritual sustenance from many different theological sources, not merely from liberal Christian thought.

Ever since that time, the Unitarian faith has been shaped by what might be called a "Trans-Christian" eclectic vision that reveres religious truth wherever it might be found.

Patrick O'Neill, this year's Channing Lecturer, is minister of Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel in Hampstead. A parish minister for 34 years, Patrick served six Unitarian Universalist churches in the US before coming to Rosslyn Hill in 2011. He holds academic degrees from Meadville Lombard Theological



Patrick O'Neill will give the 2013 Channing Lecture.

cal School, the University of Chicago Divinity School, and St Peter's Jesuit University. In 2005 Patrick was honoured as the UUA Preacher of the Living Tradition. He and his wife Patricia Williams have two children and two grandchildren.

– Fergus O'Connor

All are invited, but are all welcome?

By Bill Darlison

'All are welcome here', we sing. 'Everybody welcome,' says our notice boards. 'Whoever you are; whatever you are, we bid you welcome', we chant as we light our chalice. And yet, a visitor to our churches must ask: 'Don't you welcome young people?' 'Don't you welcome working-class people?' 'Don't you welcome people of colour?'

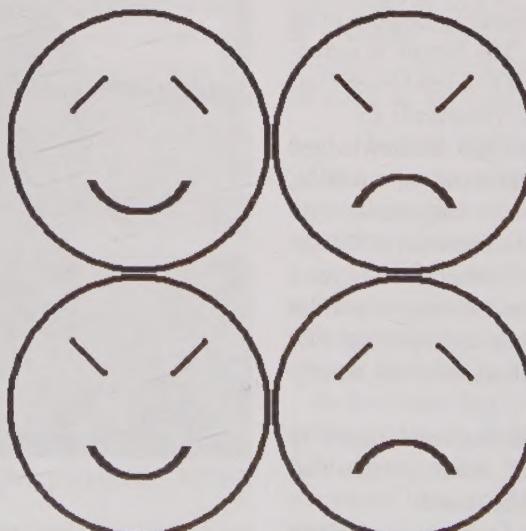
In September I was taking a service in a Lancashire chapel, and I was very happy to see a black face in the congregation, but was rather disappointed when I found out that the face belonged to the local URC minister who had come to offer his support. There's no getting away from it: in Britain, certainly, and to some extent in Ireland and the USA, we are predominantly an elderly, Caucasian, middle-class group. We have beautiful churches and chapels, a message of freedom and a promise of fellowship, which we think should appeal to the vast majority of our citizens, and yet relatively few seem to want to join us. Why might this be? Is it only because, as we like to think, they don't know about us? Or could it be that, despite our protestations to the contrary, our appeal is too narrow?

Over the past year or so I've been doing a little workshop called 'The Elements of Spirituality', in which participants explore the varieties of psychological temperament and religious expression among us, using the ancient categories of Earth, Fire, Air, and Water. (Those who are interested can see part of one of these workshops filmed by James Barry in Bridgewater at www.ukunitarian.tv/).

In former times, people would be categorised according to their dominant 'humour': melancholic (Earth), choleric (Fire), sanguine (Air), or phlegmatic (Water). Carl Jung gave these ancient categories a modern dress when he proposed that each of us had a primary personality orientation towards Sensation, Intuition, Thinking or Feeling.

'Earth' or 'Sensation' people are pragmatic, steady, reliable, and sensual. 'Fire' or 'Intuition' people are energetic, impulsive, and passionate. 'Air' or 'Thinking' people are thoughtful, light-hearted, witty, and studious; 'Water' or 'Feeling' people are sensitive, emotional, mysterious, compassionate, kind, and gentle. All four elements are in each of us, although generally one will dominate.

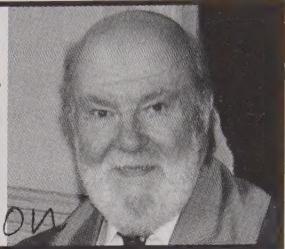
In the workshop, we asked whether differing temperaments need different worship styles. We looked at various types of ceremony, from the simple silence of the Quaker meeting (Water), to the elaborate ceremonial attached to the Catholic mass (Fire). Unitarian worship is, we concluded, predominantly an Air activity. It is rational, wordy, intellectual, disputatious, sparing in its use of symbolism, and somewhat disdainful of the kind of enthusiasm which would inspire a Pentecostal worshipper. People of more exuberant temperament, like those who flock to evangelical churches, would not



Phlegmatic, Choleric, Sanguine, Melancholic. Are Unitarians mainly Sanguine in our worship style?
Illustration by Noe, via Wikimedia Commons

Presidential Reflections

by Bill Darlison



really be comfortable in our services. We are mainly Air; we can cope with Earth, but we are suspicious of Water and somewhat frightened of Fire. Our Puritan heritage shows through. (According to GK Chesterton, a Puritan is someone who thinks that we can worship God with our head, but not with our hands and feet.)

At least, it's as 'Air' type Puritans that we have presented ourselves in the past. Coleridge, who preached in Unitarian chapels and considered becoming a minister, once remarked on the 'moonshine, heartless headwork' of most Unitarian sermons. Emerson, who was a minister for three years, pronounced the Unitarianism of his day, 'corpse-cold', and said that he preferred the silence before the start of the service to any amount of preaching. I once read a piece by a Guardian journalist who said that the first newspaper office in which he worked was 'as dreary as a Unitarian chapel on a wet Tuesday afternoon'.

Are we dreary? Are we too focused on ideas and disputation to allow more animated and cheerful worship styles? Do we still secretly hold to the doctrine of 'Salvation by bibliography'? Is the biggest compliment we can give to a service leader that his/her service was 'interesting' or 'thought-provoking'? What about 'inspiring', 'deep', 'uplifting', 'heart-warming', or 'moving'? (I sense that we are not as dominated by 'cold rationalism' as we have been hitherto. Our new ministers and our current ministerial students seem to be far more open to Fire and Water than their predecessors, and it will be interesting to see how successful their more comprehensive approach might be in attracting worshippers to our services.)

But the questions remain: should we stick with what we do best, what we are renowned for, rather than trying to become 'all things to all men'? Should we simply accept that Unitarianism is not for everybody, that we have a pretty restricted constituency, and rest content to be a church for those whose basic approach to religion is cerebral? Is it even possible for us to widen our approach – to incorporate more silence and meditation (Water), more sensual activity such as dance and music (Earth), more enthusiastic and spontaneous expressions of wonder and devotion (Fire), which spring from the heart and not the head – without alienating a good proportion of our current membership?

Recently, at the invitation of my

(Continued on next page)

Chief Officer at National Diversity Awards

Unitarian General Assembly Chief Officer, Derek McAuley was named joint runner-up as a Positive Role Model in the Race, Faith and Religion category at the National Diversity Awards Ceremony, a prestigious black-tie Awards Ceremony at the historic Queens Hotel in Leeds.

"It was a fantastic tribute to the hard work and commitment of many individuals, companies and community organisations to promote a more diverse Britain," said Derek. "It was a great honour to be nominated."

David Michael, former Detective Chief Inspector in the Metropolitan Police and champion of diversity and difference was the winner in Derek's category. There were only two faith-based nominations from amongst the 56 selected for this final stage. The other, the St Philip's Centre in Leicester is an Anglican charity, nominated in the community organisation category. They work to promote positive community relations through religion and belief training and a range of engagement, leadership and interfaith programmes.

The Lifetime Achiever Award, sponsored by IT giant Microsoft, was presented by footballer Sol Campbell to James Partridge, founder and chief executive of Changing Faces, the UK's leading charity supporting and representing people with disfigurements. James spoke about his work to change public attitudes to disfigurement and to get protections against discrimination enshrined in law. The Diverse Company of the Year, sponsored by the Co-operative, went to Farrell Element14, a leading multi-channel distributor of electronic components.

Sixteen awards were presented to positive role models, entrepreneurs of excellence and community organisations from across the UK recognising their work to address diversity across issues of age, disability, gender, race, faith, religion and sexual orientation. "It was inspiring to hear about all the nominees and to listen to the winners tell their stories," Derek said. "We had two winners on our table of 10 so my partner Martin Gilbraith and I celebrated with new friends."

Derek added that one benefit of these events is the opportunity

Are all really welcome?

(Continued from previous page)

next door neighbour, the vicar of Pontefract, I attended an Anglican service in the local parish church. It was almost indistinguishable from a Roman Catholic mass – candles, incense, parts sung in Latin, co-celebration by a number of priests. I quite liked it, because it took me back to my days as a Catholic, but I realised that, for all its beauty, it is not for everybody. But the Anglican Church is wise: that evening, at 6.30 there was Evensong, very different from the morning service, but equally beautiful and uplifting. Can we learn a lesson here? Can we, too, start to think in terms of presenting different worship experiences to suit the differing temperaments? Does our future depend on staying pretty much as we are or on becoming more comprehensive?

We need to consider these questions at local and national level.

The Rev Bill Darlison is president of the Unitarian General Assembly.



Derek McAuley's picture on the big screen when his category was awarded. Photos by Martin Gilbraith

to network. He has now arranged to visit the St Philip's Centre to learn about their work to promote positive community relations when he is in Leicester this month. Derek also noted that the inclusive stance of Unitarians was highlighted at the awards event and merited inclusion in the National Diversity Awards brochure.



Derek on the awards' red carpet.

"I was also impressed by the list of top employers who acted as sponsors including Microsoft, Transport for London, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC), Sky, MI5, The Co-operative Group, The Open University and the Financial Ombudsman Service amongst others. That such well-known names are committed to supporting the National Diversity Awards shows that they recognise the importance of building a more inclusive society.

The Awards dinner was hosted by Big Brother Star, Brian Dowling and Television presenter Cerrie Burnell. Entertainment on the night included Nachda Sansaar, a Birmingham-based Bhangra Dance Group and then to round off the evening X Factor "singing sensation" Misha B. Derek said, "I must admit that as the evening had run over time we crept out during her performance and went off to bed!"

Derek said he was pleased to have been nominated, "Thanks to the unnamed Unitarian who originally nominated me and set me on this surprising journey, and to those who supported me during the process with endorsements by producing 20 second videos; the Rev Martin Whitell, Paul Parker and Ed Fordham". It was a pleasure for Unitarians, and of course me, to be recognised."

Derek McAuley is chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.

For more information on the Diversity Awards, see: www.nationaldiversityawards.co.uk/

One World Café opens next month

By Bob Pounder

Back in 1968 the *Oldham Chronicle* featured a short promotion for the 'Unitarians in Oldham'. The closing sentence read: 'The Oldham Unitarian congregation has numbered three mayors and two Members of Parliament for Oldham among its members through the years.' Now in our bicentennial year (1813-2013), none of this history exists in living memory. The world has moved on and so must we. True, Oldham's Unitarian chapel has had its glory years but it is equally true that there have been many years of hardship and decline in both the 19th and 20th centuries. There was a time in the early 1960s that saw major damage to the Lord Street chapel roof and the ignominy of the permanent removal of the spire due to gale force winds. In those days the future looked doubtful it was only a split committee decision *in favour* of continuation that kept the Unitarian chapel alive in Oldham.

In 1966 Jane Greaves wrote; 'And that is where we leave the Lord Street community, small, harassed with troubles, without a minister and living in uncertainty. But looking back we see that there has scarcely been a time when they have not been so harassed yet always the community has survived. Today the hope is that a new site will be obtained and a new church built so that in Oldham the flame of liberal Christianity will be kept burning, where it will have a home and a centre where it can reinvigorate itself as it has been doing since 1813.'

Jane's vision was realised when, in 1971, she saw the opening of the present Unitarian chapel in Oldham. In an article in *The Inquirer* in 1975, the then-minister, the Rev John Roberts commented, 'The story of the rebirth of Oldham is one of faith; it is a miracle that it happened at all.' How right John was. It seems that our chapel history is a rebuttal to despair, a rebuke to the tacit acceptance of inevitable decline, or the notion that we cannot be sustained by a simple faith. Indeed, without such faith the Unitarian witness in Oldham would never have survived.

And so today we can look back with pride and affection at the labours and achievements of our forebears. Not only that, but we can also look forward with joy and hope not because we are enjoying some type of evangelical revival, far from it, but rather because we understand that the mission of the Church is to serve the world, to serve our community, to become relevant to ordinary people in everyday life. Our Unitarian ethos, our prayers and aspirations must become manifest in our actions.

Over 20 years ago a One World Centre was created at our



Bob Pounder (foreground) meets with Ushma Khadia, business studies tutor, (left) and some of her A-Level students. The class helped with market research.



An artist's rendering of Oldham's One World Café, currently under construction.

chapel premises by two friends, Clarice Nuttall and Marian Nuttall. The One World Centre proclaimed and stressed the unity of our one world through the promotion and sale of fairly traded goods, green issues, and the campaigns to end third world debt. In its time, the One World Centre achieved a great deal and is continued through our vision for the new One World Café. This project is supported by the Manchester District Association of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches (MDA). This café, within the chapel premises, aspires to be a modern coffee shop selling fairly traded coffee and tea. The One World Café will serve the community of Oldham and will offer volunteer places and training for those who wish to acquire new skills or for those who simply wish to invest their spare time. It will be a place where people can enjoy a cup of coffee made to a very high standard as well as enjoy a range of other products, food and snacks.

There will be a play area for small children, upholstered armchairs for relaxing; as well as the usual cafe furniture. The café will also be a Wi-Fi hotspot, and also have a computer terminal available. The emphasis will be on providing a welcoming and friendly atmosphere for visitors and for those who enjoy the company of others. For some it will be an opportunity to overcome loneliness.

As this project comes closer to realisation there is a definite air of excitement and a lot of enthusiasm from our supporters involved in the local charities of Oldham and other voluntary organisations. We continue to receive quality support and ongoing advice from the successful community cafe, Café Unity, in Heald Green, Stockport. This café was created through the local partnership of 'Churches Together'. Significantly, we are also enjoying a good relationship with our very close neighbour the Oldham Sixth Form College and in particular their Business Studies Department. The college has 2,500 students and staff. Ushma Khadia, the business studies tutor at the college has involved her A-level students in our project and they have contributed market research necessary for our business plan. Ushma was delighted when, with the support of the MDA, we were able to commission the building work which began in August. We look forward to further strengthening the relationship between the café and the college students.

(Continued on next page)

Christian Community may offer lessons

I went with my friend, Ingrid, to an Act of the Consecration of Man at a Christian Community Church in Stourbridge. You can find out the background by going to www.thechristiancommunity.co.uk

It was a lovely service, though a little strange for a Unitarian, completely unlike any other liturgy I have ever attended. I found the ritual disconcerting at first, though over coffee people explained the context and meaning of the various symbolic acts, but after a while it became rather soothing to have nothing to do except listen to the words. And the words were completely free of weeping and wailing about sin and the congregation's unworthiness. In fact the word 'light' seemed to occur more often than any other. After the service I looked for a liturgy and was told that there wasn't one. The priest writes out the liturgy by hand during his/her preparation for the priesthood. A creed is said but only by the priest, as is the Prayer of Jesus. You join in, I was told, with both, if you want to, silently. The act of communion itself involves both bread and wine and is open to all. It finishes with the priest giving Peace to each communicant. There was a little bit of music, very little singing and the shortest sermon I have ever heard.

After coffee there was a talk by the priest, who is leaving the congregation to become a lenker for a large district of churches. Lenker translates approximately as 'steersman'. The role is that of a facilitator rather than a leader which I found very interesting. I also found very interesting the fact that the Christian community has managed to survive and flourish despite having none of the funds that Christian and Unitarian congregations have accumulated over, in some cases, hundreds of years. All their buildings are paid for by the members and yet there was no offertory during the service, I had to search out a rather unprepossessing box to make my contribution. Also, interestingly, all buildings are owned by a central body which cares for their maintenance.

The post-coffee talk from the priest, Tom Ravetz, lasted about an hour. I was interested to notice that, though he had been fully garbed in vestments for the service, he wore not even a dog collar before or after it. During the talk he explained the development of the Christian Community which was an attempt in inter-war Germany to create a new church and



liturgy which would not be based on the old religions which were felt not to be capable of renewal. The new church was to avoid dogma, which Tom described as 'fossilised truth'. The community was not well-received initially and the first meeting place was burned down. The community, said Tom, had three choices: to be a victim, to pretend that nothing had happened or to work with their grief until it became a freely given deed of renunciation. Now there is an interesting thought.

His talk was entitled 'Homesick for the Future' but he explained that it was not possible to map the future, rather we had to look both deeper and higher into our own understanding to find new ways of living. Another interesting thought?

Sadly, by now we had been in the church for two and a half hours so there was no appetite for a discussion, which I thought a great pity. However I found more grist for my mill on the noticeboard outside. The Christian Community is a church 'that supports individuals who have a sense of their own freedom but who would like to explore and honour their sense of connectedness with Christ'. It went on to explain that the best answer to the question: 'What is the church about?' can be found in John 1:38. 'What are you seeking? ... Come and see.' It also stated: 'Congregations are sustained by the financial and practical care of their members'.

From a letter in their newsletter: 'One of the great things for me about the Christian Community is the way that I am invited to be involved as a whole person. The intellect and imagination are encouraged as being part of the spiritual journey, along with the social and practical.'

I particularly value the time the congregations spends together as a group, whether after a service or on other days, when we reflect on certain themes, take part in artistic activity or share biographies.

The work days are also rewarding and remind me that a community is held together by these small tasks and that my contribution is needed here. The business matters are often shared with the community as a whole, which helps me recognize my own responsibilities within this small congregation. While at times this can feel like a pressure, it is fundamentally an Offering, I feel that through my own taking part, I can really belong.' Another interesting thought?

Also from the newsletter, by Tom Ravetz: 'The Christian Community was founded 90 years ago out of the conviction that the profound crises of our age can only be met through a renewal that can replenish the moral and spiritual substance of our human world.'

At no point did anyone tell me how wonderful and unique the community was or attempt to put down any other faith group. I think we may have things to learn from the Christian Community. And no, Upper Pocklington Unitarian Church, I don't mean liturgy.

Dorothy Haughton is a Unitarian service leader in the Midlands.

November café opening

(Continued from previous page)

We intend to be ready on Saturday November 16th so that the GA President, the Rev Bill Darlison may officially open One World Café on the weekend of our 200th anniversary celebrations.

Information

More information on the One World Café can be found at www.facebook.com/theoneworldcafe or www.oldhamunitarians.org.uk You can also contact Bob Pounder on 016 339 6740 or bob.pounder@zen.co.uk The costs for this project are considerable. If you would like to support this project, your contribution, payable to Oldham Unitarian Chapel would be gratefully received and acknowledged. Any further information on possible funding sources for this project would also be gratefully received at: Unitarian Chapel, King Street, Oldham, OL8 1EB

The Rev Bob Pounder is minister at Oldham.

Letters to the Editor

Don't make Christianity one of many 'flavours'

To the Editor:

Graham Phoenix's opinion piece (*Inquirer*, 14 Sept) about his recent move from the Anglicans, and the interest this has sparked there about Unitarianism, is heartening – particularly his view that there's a 'rich vein of recruitment potential' for us among mainstream churches.

But his assessment that the 'widely liberal nature' of current Unitarianism in the UK acts as a deterrent to recruitment, is sobering – he singles out in particular professions by some leading Unitarians that they do not believe in God at all.

Will Graham Phoenix's observations challenge our tendency (of the past few decades) to present liberal Christianity as just one more 'flavour' on offer amid a myriad of spiritual choices?

Perhaps it's time to reflect on whether adopting this essentially American Unitarian Universalist strategy has worked for us. If the idea was to bring numerical growth, it has failed. (Our core numbers have fallen from over 15,000 in 1970, to fewer than 3,500 today – while Quaker numbers have largely held up over the same period). This seems to suggest – at a time of widespread discontent among liberal Anglicans (and other churchgoers) – that we may have been 'facing the wrong way' in targeting so much of our publicity effort at the 'spiritual but not religious'.

Might it not be better to project and live up to the words of our General Assembly Object (of 2001), which defines our purpose as (*inter alia*): '*to promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life ... and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition*'?

Jim Corrigall

Minister at Ipswich and Framlingham

Liberal view does not deter recruits

To the Editor:

I was sorry to read (*Inquirer*, 14 September) that Graham Phoenix is, by his own account, "rock solid" in his theology. Although this did at least prepare me for his oracular

pronouncement that the liberal nature of our denomination is "actually deterring any potential recruits".

Actually, Graham, it deters the people who would be happier expressing their spirituality through identification with past custom. And it usually deters those who want – let alone possess – a rock solid theology.

But, clearly, not always.

Mike Killingworth

London

Shouldn't the vulnerable be assured comfort in church?

The question is posed, (*Inquirer*, 14 September) 'if a person like Jimmy Savile turned up at your church...' I suppose the real question is, if someone like him turned up and we knew their leanings and their crimes and they had already faced the law and they appeared repentant, should we accommodate them?

Would those of us with vulnerable attenders be able to stomach the thought of what might be going through the mind of the 'ex-offender' despite the presence of 'safeguarding' procedures?

The best job for a recovering alcoholic might not be working behind a bar. There is a young chap who interrupts our services from time to time asking for a glass of water. From past experience we know he has to be constantly watched at the back of the hall so that nothing disappears that is not tied down. Is it fair that a person who cannot be trusted is able to put others on edge? A cynic might say that a person like Savile would never appear at a place where potential young victims did not attend. There are unfortunately an increasing amount of such churches. Point such an enquirer to those places and then see what those members' reactions are. But then you risk damaging your membership in the process.

Barry Cundill

Hull

How can churches best manage social media?

To the Editor:

In the light of suggestions from within our congregation, we at Kendal

Chapel are exploring social media as an additional way to communicate with chapel members and the wider public. We would really welcome the experience and advice from other chapels. Rather than just contacting those chapels already using social media it seems most helpful to open this up for discussion in *The Inquirer* so that other chapels who may be thinking about social media can benefit.

Whilst we do have a website, and a member has recently taken on the role of 'Tweeter', it is fair to say that whilst there are those with some experience of social media many of us have a minimal understanding of Facebook, Twitter and Blogs.

So, from the experience of others we wonder what ground rules we should consider regarding how the content and responses are best managed?

How do we ensure that the whole congregation feels involved? Please note we do not intend to replace our existing magazine.

What do others think are the pros and cons of social media as a tool for communication?

Many thanks,

Ann Wilcox

Chair of Kendal Congregation

ann42wilcox@gmail.com

www.ukunitarians.org.uk/kendal

Twitter: @kendalunitarian

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF. Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes.

Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.

When Hiawatha came to Hucklow

By Valerie Walker

Neither war paint nor spectacular feathered head-dresses adorned the 50 or so members and friends of the Unitarian Music Society when they met for their annual conference at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre in August, although we were told such dressing-up was not uncommon at early performances of 'Hiawatha's Wedding Feast'. This musical gem by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (to words from HW Longfellow's 'The Song of Hiawatha') was the focus of a week-end bursting with music and happy reunions.

From as far afield as the South Coast of England, Scotland and Dublin, from early teens to seniors and from experienced to novice musicians, we joined together for an enjoyable long week-end of singing, playing and congenial company. There was an interesting programme of music-related activities available for which we must thank conference organiser Nick Morrice. Nick also gave an illustrated talk on Coleridge-Taylor and later played several examples of his other compositions to enhance our appreciation of the composer. It was possible to choose between sessions on 'Songs from the Shows (Evita)', 'Music Making', Composition, Chamber Music and a Recorder group, all interspersed with rehearsals for the main work.

Enjoying our after-dinner coffee or another glass or two of wine on the Saturday evening we were treated to a relaxing selection of Salon Music from talented Society members.

Sunday morning's service in Great Hucklow Old Chapel was led by the Rev David Shaw whose thought-provoking theme was 'Act of God?' Of course we music types not only squeezed the regular congregation into a couple of pews but we also offered them some of our musical efforts; we are grateful for their hospitality and tolerance at this musical invasion, which we hope they enjoyed.

On both Saturday and Sunday afternoons there was free time, and clement weather, for those who wanted to take the opportunity to visit places of interest in the Peak District. Needless to say that even during these times there were those reluctant to be torn away from the little black dots.

With so little time to rehearse a full work we were all delighted (and maybe a little surprised?) at the result, and the appreciation of our small audience, when we performed 'Hiawatha' on the Sunday evening. Matthew Smith gave a stunning rendition



The Unitarian Music Society attracted people of all ages to the conference held in August. Photo by Sue Teagle

of the solo tenor role and David Dawson our music director had ably transcribed the instrumental score for the available musicians and firmly guided our efforts – our success was entirely due to him.

Following on that evening was one of the regular events in every UMS gathering, the Informal Concert, when anyone attending, who wishes to, is encouraged to 'do their party piece'. Some sang, some played, some sang and played, some told funny stories or recited poetry – it was a very entertaining and amusing couple of hours. At the close of each evening's formal programme, brief meditative epilogues were led by Ashley Hills, Lyanne Mitchell and Joy Croft.

Of course as this was an annual conference there had to be an AGM; this was cleverly timetabled to take place between chapel and lunch and ran immaculately to time. Business was dealt with briskly; we have a new Chair, new Treasurer and new Conference Organisers and the next annual conference will take place from 8-11 August 2014 at The Nightingale Centre. We also hope to make a visit centred on the Dublin Unitarian Church from 9-11 May 2014.

If you are interested in joining the Society, or coming to the next conference which you will certainly enjoy – you do not have to be a member, or to sing or play as we love to have an audience – please check our website: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/musicsociety

Valerie Walker is a member of the Unitarian Music Society.



There were lots of opportunities for musicians to play at the UMS weekend. Photo by Sue Teagle

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Unitarians in Wales celebrate Trinity Act

By Ellis Lewis-Jones

On a warm and sunny Sunday in September more than 100 Unitarians from both East and West regions of South Wales gathered in the grounds of St Fagan's National History Museum to celebrate the passing of the Trinity Act in 1813. The event was organised by Diana Bianchi the Secretary of Cardiff Unitarians

The celebrations began in the grounds of the museum, with a colourful parade of congregational and district banners. Children walked alongside their parents and representatives of many of the Unitarian congregations in Wales.

Following the Banner parade, the group assembled in Penrhiew Chapel for a bilingual service led by the Rev Wyn Thomas. The Rev Eric Jones in his reading described the origins of Unitarianism in Merthyr and Aberdare which began in an isolated barn on the hillside above and between both valley towns. He reminded those present that to be a Unitarian in the early days prior to 1813 was not for the faint-hearted. Those who chose to worship in accordance with their conscience defied the law and risked substantial penalties. We owe much to the early Unitarians in Wales who kept the movement alive in very challenging circumstances. The prayers were conducted by the Rev Cen Llwyd. In the address, the Rev Wyn Thomas explored the theme of 'Toleration of Difference'. Borrowing a carrot and a potato from the Harvest display he began his address by involving the children who contributed enthusiastically to a lively discussion on the difference between potatoes and carrots, both vegetables -- but different vegetables. The service concluded with the Benediction given by the Rev Lewis Rees.

Following the service, tea was provided by Cardiff Unitar-



The whole group joined the parade. Photo by Keith L. Lewis-Jones

ians.

A day of raising the profile of Unitarianism in South Wales was later rounded off for some by attending the evening service at Hen Dy Cwrrd Unitarian Chapel, Cefncoedycymer – the oldest Nonconformist cause in the Merthyr Tydfil area. There, in a 'Heritage Open-Doors' event, they enjoyed some fine singing and heard guest speaker Joe England (historian, author and broadcaster) who gave a masterly address on 'The Unitarian Contribution to the History of Merthyr', which left those present in no doubt that the local Unitarians of that period who played a prominent part in social and civic matters changed Merthyr from a hastily created industrial encampment to a proper town.

Ella Lewis-Jones is a member of the Aberdare congregation.

Great year for the Sunday School Union

By Margaret Barber

The 83rd North Cheshire Unitarian Sunday School Union Arts & Crafts Exhibition was opened by Linda Kennon, who has been adjudicating the Recitation/Reading at Sight/Choral Verse Speaking sections of the programme for 27 years, even though she did have maternity leave once, and on another occasion, had the audacity to be ill! Linda has become a good friend of the Arts and Crafts, as well as being an enthusiastic and encouraging adjudicator. Claire Maddocks, our President, took the chair, and the Rev Eric Breeze provided the prayer and vote of thanks.

Entries were almost 100 up on last year, and there was strong competition, as usual.

New Chapel, Denton were overall winners, with 215 points, the runners-up being Stalybridge with 167. Stalybridge also won the Primary Award with a hefty 111 points, a clear 49.5 more than runners-up, Dukinfield Old Chapel.

Flowery Field won the Challenge Trophy for the highest average mark, with 80.9%. Frances Brookfield from Denton won the Jubilee Award, now presented to competitors in Class D who gain the highest individual marks, with 43 points, her sister, Elly, retaining the Teenage award for Class E with 37 points, a hat-trick for Elly, who now is entitled to a replica trophy.

Adam Lambe from Stalybridge won the Spotlight Award for

Solo Singing, showing improving potential in the eyes of the adjudicator. Frances won the Jack Hinds Award for Solo Musical Instrument (novice), Elly winning the John Taylor Award for the experienced section of the instrumentalists. Dad, Gary Brookfield, not to be left out, won the Alice M Kelsall Award for the highest points in Solo Singing in Class F. Dukinfield took the Centenary Award for their Choir, as well the Albert Slater Award for their Senior Play Reading. After years of neglect, the Junior Play Reading Trophy had to be buffed-up, so that the youngsters from Stalybridge could take it home with pride.

There were 5 items gaining maximum scores of 100%. Alyson Brookfield for Original Poetry, Adam Lambe for Recitation, Jodie Oatway and Frances Brookfield for Reading at Sight and Dukinfield for Junior Choral Verse. Well done to those 5, but thank you to all competitors for taking part, winning prizes or not.

Thanks to everyone involved in any of the preparations for the day, especially the people from Dukinfield Old Chapel for their hospitality.

The springtime weather proved rather annoying, it was that fine stuff that wets you through! No-one was put off, though, and the ladies in the cafe were kept very busy during the afternoon.

Margaret Barber is secretary of the NCUSU.